

Bring Your Bible Back

FAITH

Why I bring a leather-bound Bible and a notebook to church for distraction-free, sensory-rich worship in an AI-saturated age.

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Photo by Kelly Sikkema on Unsplash

Over the years I've tried just about every way of bringing my Bible to church: a physical notebook, a digital Bible, a digital notebook, a mix of physical and digital, and even a physical Bible paired with an audio recording of the sermon on my phone. After all that experimenting, I've landed on what I believe is the best system for me—and, I'd argue, for many of us: a physical Bible and a physical notebook.

Recently I retired my falling-apart Bible from 2012 and replaced it with an ESV Thinline bound in full-grain leather. It's the most expensive Bible I've ever owned. It looks beautiful and, yes, it even smells good. That tactile, sensory experience has been the most delightful I've ever had with Scripture in any format. At the same time, I moved back to a paper notebook rather

than relying on phone apps or sermon recordings. I take notes primarily to stay attentive during the sermon, not to prepare a message or to mine them later; the act of writing helps me listen.

One of the main reasons I stepped away from digital Bibles and note-taking apps is distraction. Phones are portals—notifications and other apps are always one swipe away. Analog tools, by contrast, are quiet. There's a simple pleasure in turning thin Bible pages, choosing a favorite pen each Sunday, and feeling ink move across paper. No digital substitute matches the feedback of paper under your hand or the durability of a well-made, full-grain cover. Using physical tools engages more of our senses and can make the experience of worship more grounded—separate from, though not replacing, the spiritual nourishment of the preached Word.

I also grew up in a church where everyone brought their own Bible. Since smartphones became ubiquitous, fewer people do. Ironically, while phones can hold dozens of translations, I don't see many people actually following along on their screens during the sermon. Often, as soon as the phone comes out, attention drifts—to a text, an alert, or a timeline.

As a Protestant Christian, I believe it's risky not to follow the quoted verses for ourselves. No matter how much we love or trust our pastors, it's our responsibility to verify that what's being preached aligns with Scripture. Having a physical Bible open in front of us makes that practice natural and immediate.

There's another reason I stress a physical Bible today: we're living in an era saturated with AI-generated and rapidly updated digital content. If we're not careful, we could end up using an app with an inaccurate rendering, a quietly revised paraphrase, or background updates that slowly dilute or reframe the text. A physical Bible, using time-tested, scholarly translations, gives us a stable reference that won't change overnight.

The same goes for note-taking. A paper notebook is non-distracting, approachable, and always ready. Even if you never preach from your notes or reread them, the act of writing helps you focus and internalize what you hear. And, honestly, it's a joy to pick a different pen each week.

Underneath all of this is a bigger issue: intentionality. Many of us live on autopilot, moving fast, reacting to whatever pings us next. A physical Bible, a notebook, and a pen ask us to slow down and choose our tools on purpose. They set a deliberate pace for Sunday worship and for quiet time at home—unhurried, tangible, and attentive.

To be clear, digital tools can serve real needs: accessibility features, quick searches, travel convenience, or parallel translations can be genuinely helpful. But for me, and perhaps for many of us, the analog path—Bible in hand, pen to paper—creates the most faithful, focused, and satisfying way to sit under God's Word.

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